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ABSTRACT

The use of dialogue journals as a means of communication between students and teachers originated as a teacher-developed classroom practice rather than a research idea or theory-derived technique. It began in 1964 when a California teacher, Leslee Reed, became fascinated with the comments about learning that she solicited from her students, and responded in writing. In 1979, a researcher began to analyze the communicative aspect of the diaries and teacher responses and found rich and varied language and thought in them. When the teacher was transferred to another school, where many immigrant children were learning English as a second language (ESL), she continued the practice with considerable success. A second researcher undertook a study of those diaries and the interaction in the classroom, which resulted in a collaborative research project. A third study at Gallaudet College, a four-year college exclusively for deaf students, examined the effect of sustained written interaction for deaf students and their teachers. The use of dialogue journals spread initially by word of mouth among teachers and researcher-educators, and has now become the focus of a professional newsletter, a variety of new research projects, and a number of doctoral dissertations. Two of these dissertations, by Jana Staton (University of California at Los Angeles) and Joy Kreeft (Georgetown University) respectively, were studies of the dialogue journal strategies used in Leslee Reed's two California classrooms. A dissertation by Robby Morroy (Georgetown University) examined more closely Reed's strategies for responding to and establishing understanding with ESL students. Marsha Markham (University of Maryland) studied the effects of dialogue journals in upper division composition classes, and Deborah Braig (University of Pennsylvania) analysed second graders' audience awareness as manifested in their dialogue journals. Abstracts of all five dissertations are included in this report and a list of publications on dialogue journals is appended. (MSE)

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History of Dialogue Journals

and

Dissertation Abstracts

Jana Staton and Joy Kreeft Peyton

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A RECENT HISTORY OF DIALOGUE JOURNALS

Jana Staton and Joy Kreeft Peyton

This brief history of the use of "dialogue journals"--as distinguished from their monologue cousin, the personal journal, describes how the idea began, and focuses on the relationship of the various research projects which have been largely responsible for disseminating the idea. It has often been said that "nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come." Dialogue journals represent not a theoretically generated idea, but a teacher-developed classroom practice which came to the attention of other teachers, researchers, and teacher educators at a time when the broader ideas of interactional participation in learning and the power of natural conversational discourse were becoming widespread. Dialogue journals have spread quickly by word of mouth because they are an instance of concepts which have not yet found practical expression in terms of concrete educational practices.

Dialogue journals began as a classroom practice rather than as a research idea or theory-derived technique. We do not know exactly when or where some teacher first made personal written dialogues a consistent means of communication with students. Perhaps for many years there have been teachers who have written informal responses either to their students' entries in personal journals or to other written work, and a continuing conversation ensued. Teachers in many parts of the country, after hearing about the research on dialogue journals, have told us that they have been doing this kind of written exchange with their students. The practice of interactive written conversations may go back as far as the beginning of writing itself. There is a long history of note passing among family members, fellow workers and students, but the beginning of a more permanent, cumulative notebook for such exchanges is unrecorded. However extensive the pre-history of dialogue journals, the recorded history of the research on dialogue journals in classroom settings is rather brief, beginning sometime in 1979.

Beginnings: The Classroom Practice

The particular history of dialogue journals as the focus of research and eventual dissemination began with one teacher in Los Angeles, Leslee Reed, who had been dialoguing with her sixth grade students since about 1964. Her particular practice began when a principal asked teachers to make sure their students left school each day remembering something they had learned or done (so that they would not announce at the dinner table that they had learned "nothing"). Leslee Reed decided that asking students each afternoon to write down something they had learned would be the best way to reinforce their memory. As she collected these slips of paper, she grew fascinated with the different responses to the same class lessons, and began writing back when a student's comment seemed to need an answer.

Since the daily collection of slips of paper soon became unmanageable, the use of bound composition books became a practical way to keep track of these daily dialogues. As the journals grew into year-long conversations, she found that the private discussions allowed students to ask questions, complain,

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This article will be published as part of the forthcoming book, Dialogue Journal Communication: Classroom, Linguistic, Social and Cognitive Views, by Staton, Shuy, Kreeft and Reed, Norwood, NJ. Ablex.

request help in solving personal as well as academic problems, and to share feelings—in fact, the journals soon became the core of her instruction.

Because Reed found that the privacy of these conversations was the key to their success, she kept their existence rather quiet, letting parents and the principal know only that a personal journal was part of her instructional program, but not advertising the fact that she spent an hour a night responding to her students. Leslee Reed, like many excellent teachers committed to the art and science of teaching and to her students, saw nothing too remarkable in her practice of carrying on 26 private written conversations each day. Without some rather chance crossing of paths (see below), her use of dialogue journals would have escaped the notice of others, and perhaps many more years would have passed before any effort or study would have focused on this practice.

The Start of the Dialogue Journal Research Project

In 1979, Jana Staton, then studying counseling psychology at UCLA, was searching for instances of writing being used in school as a kind of informal or "preventive" intervention to help adolescents solve personal and academic problems. Staton heard about Reed's journals from a friend whose children had been in her class. Getting in touch with Mrs. Reed turned out to be easy, as they belonged to the same church in West Los Angeles. During the spring of 1979, Reed and Staton discussed her use of journals as a means of personal communication with each student. The obvious differences between traditional monologue journals (which students are asked to keep and turn in periodically, as a form of process writing and "self-reflection") and these ongoing conversations quickly became apparent, and the name "dialogue journal" suggested itself as a way to distinguish them from their more common and well-known cousins.

Staton decided that the dialogue journal practice would become the focus of her dissertation, and gained the cooperation of Reed and the school's principal, Mrs. Winifred Fischer, to visit the classroom, to meet with parents to secure initial consent, and then to spend time getting to know each student. 1979-80 became the year of collecting the first full-year corpus of dialogue journals, from 26 sixth graders in a Los Angeles public school which served a middle-class neighborhood. These students were all native-born and native speakers of English. In what is now thought of as the "early days," Staton was sustained in her work largely by an intuition that these written dialogues were a new and unknown world, best reflected in the lines of a Santayana poem:

> O World, thou choosest not the better part;
> It is not wisdom to be only wise,
> And on the inner vision close the eyes,
> But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
> Columbus found a world and had no chart,
> Save that which faith deciphered in the skies.
> 'Twas all his science and his only art.

Because of the complexity of this natural language discourse, and its lack of resemblance to anything in the research literature on writing or composition, Staton asked Roger Shuy, a sociolinguist at Georgetown University, for help in developing methods for analysis. Discourse analysis and converational analysis methods were becoming more widely known in the field of linguistics in 1979, and

Shuy had just completed a major study of children's (oral) functional language at the Center for Applied Linguistics. Shuy was able to suggest a wealth of ideas and provide guidance to the growing new fields of discourse and conversational analysis. But Mehan at UCSD and Pat Greenfield of UCLA also contributed initially in formulating how research could be done on interactive written texts.

In the middle of this 1979-1980 year of data collection, Staton submitted a proposal to the National Institute of Education to study in detail the 26 dialogue journal texts and describe the nature of the journals as a writing event. At that time, the Writing Team at NIE, headed by Dr. Marcia (Whiteman) Farr, was encouraging more ethnographically and qualitatively oriented studies, and NIE funded the study, to be conducted at the Center for Applied Linguistics.

With the funding of this first study, "Analysis of Dialogue Journal Writing as a Communicative Event," in July, 1980, Staton moved to Washington to conduct the analysis, forming a team with Roger Shuy and, very shortly, Joy Kreeft, who had just come to Georgetown University to study sociolinguistics. Thus, the original study was stretched (with a lot of volunteered time) into a three-person effort in Washington, with a fourth member, Reed, in Los Angeles carefully reading everything that was written, and continually deepening our understanding of the dialogue journal practice. The final report, which was completed in February of 1982 and disseminated by the Center for Applied Linguistics, demonstrates the rich and varied language and thought which evolve as two people interact about mutually interesting and important events and topics over an extended period of time.

Study of Dialogue Journals with Nonnative English Speakers

In the fall of 1980, Reed was unexpectedly transferred to a new school in the middle of Los Angeles, one with students who had migrated to the United States from all over the world. This unplanned event provided a wonderful opportunity to observe dialogue journal use with nonnative English speakers. The students in her sixth grade class came from 14 different countries and 9 different language backgrounds, and some of them knew little or no English when the year began. Any thought that the dialogue journals would be less successful with students not yet proficient in English was quickly disspelled as Reed began to report on the value of the dialogue in helping her students acquire a second language. With Reed's encouragement, arrangements were made to ask student and parent consent to copy a second year of journals, and to make a videotaped record of this classroom.

This opportunity to study dialogue journal use with a group of nonnative English speakers led to a second dissertation, and the second NIE grant growing out of Mrs. Reed's classroom. Kreeft began her dissertation research in 1982, visiting Mrs. Reed's classroom to observe the dialogue journal practice and interview Reed and her students. Kreeft received an NIE grant in 1983 through the Center for Applied Linguistics to support the analysis of dialogues written by nonnative speakers. Staton, Shuy and Reed collaborated on this study, and Robby Morroy, another sociolinguistics student at Georgetown University, joined the research team. The NIE report, "Dialogue Writing: Analysis of Student-Teacher Interactive Writing in the Learning of English as a Second Language," completed in 1985, explores in depth the many aspects of the journal interaction

that support and promote second language acquisition. The report is greatly enhanced by a practitioner-oriented chapter written by Leslee Reed. It is available through the Center for Applied Linguistics.

The Dialogue Journal Project at Gallaudet College

In 1982, as the first study was being completed, Dr. William Stokoe invited Staton to begin working with him as a consultant at Gallaudet College (the federally supported four-year college in Washington, D.C. for hearing-impaired students). An initial project, funded by the Gallaudet Research Institute, encouraged college faculty to adapt dialogue journals for use in communicating with deaf students at the college level, and began documenting the effects on both deaf students and their teachers of sustained written interaction in a conversational format. The Gallaudet campus also includes model elementary and secondary schools, and soon teachers at all levels--from kindergarten through graduate school--were involved in using dialogue journals.

The research focus of the Gallaudet project was to document the practical benefits of dialogue journals from the teacher's perspective and identify strategies for achieving optimal effectiveness within actual classroom settings. Teachers at the college and pre-college level, especially Cindy Puthoff, Jean Slobodzian and Margaret Walworth, have become involved in the analysis of their students' texts, and have conducted workshops around the country for other teachers of deaf students and published papers growing out of research on the project. Two primary grade teachers, Susan Searls and Jean Slobodzian, pioneered the use of dialogue journals with young deaf students and, along with Puthoff and Staton, have completed a handbook for elementary and secondary teachers on the use of dialogue journals, focusing particularly on their use and benefits with deaf students (It's Your Turn Now!, spring, 1986, from Outreach Programs, Gallaudet College). A handbook on college-level uses, with articles from the college faculty, is also underway.

Spreading the Word

When this research began, there was no formal plan to disseminate information about the dialogue journal practice to other teachers. The dialogue journals were seen as a unique expression of this particular teacher's concepts and style of teaching, and it seemed unlikely that many other teachers would pick up the idea without training and perhaps some kind of incentive. Thus, the major presentations and papers from the first project were intended primarily for researchers. However, because the dialogue journals represented a concrete instance of such concepts as interactional scaffolding, mutual knowledge construction, and natural language acquisition, a number of those researchers had both the theoretical framework and a commitment to practice to enable them to begin disseminating the idea as soon as they heard about it. These folks--including Courtney Cazden, Dixie Goswami, Bambi Schieffelin, Jessie Roderick, Angela Jaggar, Dorothy Strickland, Vic Rentel, Yetta and Ken Goodman, Shirley Brice Heath, Fred Erickson, Susan Florio, Chris Clark, Fran Davis and Sarah Huddleson, among others--heard about the dialogue journals, went home, and either began using them in college courses or encouraged classroom teachers they worked with to use them.

Thus, the early research reports and word of mouth led to an increasing number of teachers implementing dialogue journals effectively, well before any

written descriptions were available. It is now apparent that a sizeable number of teachers from kindergarten through college share the same basic educational precepts as Leslee Reed, and upon hearing a brief description of dialogue journals, understand exactly how to fit the practice into their teaching.

Even during this research phase, two very active practitioner-oriented dissemination efforts began. In Los Angeles, Leslee Reed was asked in 1981 to join the UCLA Writing Project as a consultant, and has given workshops for teachers throughout the greater Los Angeles area ever since, as well as presenting at the Chancellor's Conference on Composition at UCLA. On the East Coast, during the years from 1981 to 1984, several Georgetown University Ph.D. candidates, including Shelley Gutstein and Joy Kreeft Peyton, began using dialogue journals with ESL students in classes they were teaching. Gutstein and Kreeft collaborated with other ESL teachers--Christine Meloni (George Washington), Carol Harmatz (Georgetown), and Henry Batterman (now at Lewis and Clark)--to present a number of workshops in 1982, 1983 and 1984, including presentations at the TESOL annual meetings and WATESOL meetings in the Washington, D.C. area. These workshops and presentations, based on these teachers' own use as well as the data beginning to emerge from the study of nonnative speakers, provided a practitioner-oriented focus. A network began to form of ESL and foreign language teachers using dialogue journals around the country.

Our brief attempt to decribe how the use of dialogue journals has spread from teacher to teacher and from researcher-educator to teacher points out that most people who actually try out dialogue journals not only find them invaluable, but become dissemination centers for everyone around them.

The DIALOGUE newsletter began in April, 1982 as an informal means of getting in touch with the growing body of people who had attended workshops or research presentations or who had written for the NIE report. As both our information base and our readership grew, the newsletter changed from a free mimeographed document into an 8-12 page newsletter with a paid subscription list. The newsletter discusses specific issues and topics which the dialogue journals illuminate, and provides a channel of interaction with many people involved or interested in dialogue journal use in a wide variety of settings. The list of around 500 represents a mix of researchers, classroom teachers, teacher trainers, and educators of the deaf throughout the United States, Canada, and overseas. Fortunately, the Center for Applied Linguistics has been unfailingly supportive of the production and dissemination of the newsletter, allowing it to grow into a more professional product on a budget which covers only printing and postage.

Dissertations

Along with the NIE grant, Staton continued to develop her concepts for a dissertation in the field of counseling practice, which finally emerged in 1984 as "Acquiring Practical Reasoning through Teacher-Student Interaction in Dialogue Journals," Graduate School of Education, UCLA. It extended her research for the NIE grant within the framework of informal, preventive counseling in the classroom, analyzing the teacher's intuitive use of interactional scaffolding in thinking through and social problems with students in early adolescence.

Kreeft's dissertation at Georgetown University also developed in tandem with her NIE research, focusing on the emerging grammatical competence of the beginning ESL learners, describing their patterns of use of English morphology in this written medium, and change over ten months' time in their use of certain morphemes.

Morry's dissertation, also at Georgetown, examined more closely the strategies Leslee Reed uses to respond and establish understanding with students learning English as a second language. As more doctoral candidates began adapting dialogue journals to their own teaching situations, dissertations on the use of interactive written conversations with other students have appeared. Marsha Markman (University of Maryland) studied the effects of dialogue journal use on attitudes and writing skills in upper division composition classes; Jack Farley (University of Cincinnati) studied the dialogue journal texts of mildly retarded vocational rehabilitation students; Deborah Jaffer Braig (University of Pennsylvania) analyzed second-graders' developing "audience awareness" as manifested in their dialogue journal texts. Shelley Gutstein (Georgetown University) is studying topic development in the dialogue journals of Japanese university students learning English.

The Future

Our work is far from complete. Fortunately, we neither invented the practice of dialogue journals nor the theory and concepts underlying them, and we have tried to emphasize in this account the growing number of people who have participated in some way in this work. As teachers around the world recognize the power of extended written dialogues for students in many different learning situations and seek to integrate the use of dialogue journals into their programs, we want to understand more clearly how the basic concept of functional, contextualized written interaction can fit into and even influence other kinds of communication in the classroom (oral, signed, written), and how teachers can effectively utilize the dialogue journal text to conduct research on their students' needs and progress and their own educational practices. In a new project at the Center for Applied Linguistics, funded through the Center for Language Education and Research, we hope to address these and other concerns.

We feel that the inner vision that guided our early work has indeed led us into a complex and exciting new world, and we are eager to continue in this collaborative exploration with other teachers and researchers.

Dissertation Abstracts

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Teacher-Student Dialogue Writing in a College Composition Course: Effects Upon Writing Performance and Attitudes.

Marsha Carow Markman, Doctor of Philosophy, 1983.

Dissertation directed by: Dr. John C. Carr, Professor
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Maryland, College Park.

This study was designed to investigate the effects of the dialogue journal on the writing performance and attitudes of college composition students, and to analyze ways in which dialogue writing is used to fulfill individual student needs and course requirements. Its further purpose was to measure student and teacher attitudes toward this activity.

Each of five teachers taught two sections of a required professional writing course for students of junior standing at the University of Maryland, College Park. These ten classes provided treatment and control groups totaling 161 students.

All of the students in the sample responded to a writing attitude questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the semester; and students in the treatment group along with their teachers, responded to dialogue journal attitude questionnaires at the end of the semester. In addition, pretest and posttest writing samples were composed by students in both groups and were scored using the Diederich Scale (Modified). Throughout the semester, the

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Acquiring Practical Reasoning Through Teacher-Student Interactions in Dialogue Journals

Jana Jo Staton

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles

Los Angeles, California

This study address the problem of how a teacher can help students acquire those concepts, beliefs, strategies and knowledge of themselves, other persons and the world on which rational deliberation and choices about action are based. Such practical reasoning is the heuristic, non-syllogistic rationality which characterizes human action. The thesis of this study is that practical reasoning is gradually acquired through extended interpersonal interactions with adults during which the child learns to observe and practice the relevant concepts and strategies for understanding and acting on the world. With many such opportunities, children are prepared for autonomy as adults.

The data for the analysis consist of the complete texts of 20 dialogue journals from a sixth grade class written during the 1979-1980 school year. Dialogue journals are private written conversations which occur daily in this class between each student and their teacher. The dialogue journal texts provide a unique record of the daily, spontaneous thinking of children about the important events of their lives. Methods

describes how she acquires better strategies for expressing feelings, describing what happened, and reflecting on and evaluating her own actions. The second study, of a student's ("Gordon") understanding of the connection between his own actions and achievement in math, traces the students's changes in beliefs in response to the teacher's active intervention in guiding his perceptions and reasoning through the dialogue. These two intensive studies provide an empirical picture of the actual acquisition of more socially mature and effective reasoning capacities.

The journal demonstrates how students are first involved in playing the teacher's game of how to think about what happens, why things happen, and what their own actions or responses might be. Even if they do not always make the right choices, they are continuously involved in the structure of reasoning about choices and alternatives which the teacher creates. Implications for counseling practice and research, and for educational practice are considered throughout.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING AND THE ACQUISITION OF GRAMMATICAL MORPHOLOGY IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

By

Joy Elaine Kreeft
Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
October, 1984

This study investigated the acquisition of grammatical morphology in English as a second language as manifested in beginning ESL learners' dialogue journal writing. Dialogue journals are bound notebooks in which students and a teacher interact regularly in a written, informal "conversation."

Research questions related to the following issues: the degree of proficiency reached over ten months' time with the use of the morphemes studied; the uniformity of acquisition patterns among individual students and across the three sample periods; similarities between the findings of this study and previous studies of morpheme acquisition in ESL; linguistic factors constraining morpheme production in this written mode and the relationship between morpheme production in speech and writing.

The data for the study were the daily dialogue journal writing of five sixth grade students and their teacher over a period of ten months. The students were nonnative English speakers, who had been in the United States for less than one year when they began writing in the dialogue journals. Their first languages were Korean (2), Korean/Portuguese (1), Burmese (1), and Italian (1). Each student's dialogue journal consisted of around 100-150 interactions (one student entry and one teacher response equals one interaction). Three

ABSTRACT

Teacher Strategies: Linguistic Devices
for Sustaining Interaction in Dialogue Journal Writing

Robby Morroy

This study describes teacher strategies as they are employed in dialogue journal writing and measures their relative effectiveness to achieve some of the goals of the interaction. Dialogue journals are notebooks in which students and their teacher engage in a daily, dyadic, written, informal, conversation throughout the school year.

Research issues included the strategies that can be identified in the dialogue journals; the students' response behavior; the linguistic characteristics of the students' responses at the syntactic, semantic and discourse levels; and the variation of these characteristics over ten months' time.

Although writing in the journals is only semi-voluntary, actual communication is completely voluntary. Getting students to write in their journals every day is definitely no guarantee for actual communication. The strategies that the teacher employs are seen as necessary tools to promote communication.

ABSTRACT

SIX AUTHORS IN SEARCH OF AN AUDIENCE:
DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING
OF SECOND GRADERS

DEBORAH E. BRAIG

DR. BAMBI SCHIEFFELIN, CHAIRPERSON
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

This study examined the audience awareness characteristics in the dialogue journal writing of children ages six, seven, and eight.

A total of seventeen children and one teacher/researcher participated in this ethnographic study over a period of nine months. The data were collected during the usual language arts sessions in an elementary school. What the children wrote in their journals, what they said about the writing process in taped interviews, and the researcher field notes constituted the data base.

The findings of the research suggested:

1. Young writers demonstrated in their dialogue journal writing that they considered the needs of their intended audience on communicative, affective, and reflective levels in both spontaneous and solicited contexts.

2. The young children's 'talk about writing' in interviews supported the fact that they intended to meet the needs of their audience on different levels.

3. Dialogue journals played a facilitating role in the development of the children's written language competence.

The dialogue journal was selected for this research as a specific context for exploring the concept of audience awareness in writing.

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